

**GARRY
KASPAROV
ON MY GREAT
PREDECESSORS
PART III**



POPULAR CHESS

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Petrosian and Spassky with the Major of Amsterdam
at the opening ceremony of the IBM tournament, 1973

Introduction

At the Junction of the Eras

This volume is devoted to the lives and games of two chess kings from the sixties and seventies of the last century – Petrosian and Spassky, as well as their outstanding opponents – Gligoric, Polugayevsky, Portisch and Stein.

In the introduction to the second volume I wrote that a genuine revolution in chess was accomplished by every fifth world champion: Steinitz (1st) – Botvinnik (6th) – Fischer (11th). Steinitz created a school of positional play, and Botvinnik – a system of preparing for competitions and sharp opening set-ups, whereby Black, ignoring classical rules, immediately disturbs the positional equilibrium and strives to seize the initiative. With the next four champions – Smyslov, Tal, Petrosian and Spassky – the theory of the game developed along the lines of the Botvinnik era, which thereby continued to the late 1960s. In the early 1970s the next revolutionary spurt was made by Fischer, essentially laying the foundation of present-day professional chess.

Nominally the Botvinnik era ended in 1963, when the champion of many years lost his match to Petrosian and opted out of any further contests for the chess crown. Soon after this Botvinnik wrote in *Chess World* (1964 No.2):

‘It seems to me that in chess the time of geniuses has passed. In their time Morphy, Steinitz, Lasker, Capablanca and Alekhine were definitely superior to their contemporaries, and in particular by talent. Nowadays with talent alone you cannot exist: also required are health, a strong-willed competitive character and, finally, special preparation. A few decades ago the natural selection of the strongest players occurred among a comparatively narrow circle of people, and there were not many such players – their names are known to everyone. But now the mass base of chess is so great, that there are many very strong players – at present it is crowded on the chess Olympus. A good dozen grandmasters are distinguished by striking talent, and enviable health, and fighting character, and deep special preparation. The importance of special preparation should especially be mentioned: sometimes it is intuitive, at other times it consists in reducing to the minimum the influence of

the opponent's preparation – a quality which is evidently typical of the new world champion. It can be asserted that, in the forming of the modern strong player, talent is no longer the decisive factor.'

One senses that Botvinnik's wounds had not yet healed after his heavy defeat. In fact, of course, he realised that he had lost to a great player. Three years later he asked Spassky, who had just lost a match to Petrosian: 'Were you able to guess his moves, Boris Vasilievich?' 'No, not always,' Spassky replied. 'I too was unable to guess them,' Botvinnik admitted. In his way of speaking this was the highest praise for his opponent! Subsequently he also gave both Spassky and Fischer their due...

Also debatable is his thesis about it being 'crowded on the chess Olympus'. Now the mass base of chess is even greater than forty years ago, and there are even more top-class grandmasters, but the proportions between the strong and very strong have not changed and the number of *real* contenders for the world championship is still extremely restricted.

However, in Botvinnik's evaluation there is an historic truth: the names of the past champions were always shrouded in a romantic halo of grandeur. However, the 1938 AVRO tournament, where Capablanca, Alekhine and Euwe made way for the young, signified the ending of the heroic era of the chess titans. Even so, thanks to his legendary victories in the 1940s, Botvinnik succeeded in prolonging this era – not without reason was he called the Patriarch of the Soviet Chess School. Smyslov was rightly regarded as his great opponent, and Tal as a vivid star, a meteor, 'the second Morphy'.

And suddenly at the summit there appeared Petrosian and Spassky – seemingly ordinary, non-heroic champions. But a detailed study of their games demonstrates the enormous scale of the talent of these chess kings, and the time when they were on the throne was an important stage in the accumulation of knowledge – something of a consolidating period, when the basis of modern chess was laid. In these years *Chess Informator* appeared, new opening schemes arose, the concepts of many middlegame positions were deepened, customary dogmas were reviewed (for example, the approach to positions with an isolated pawn changed) and so on.

The second Petrosian-Spassky match (1969) already heralded the approaching change of eras, which began with the arrival of Fischer. But that is a topic of the next volume.

I should like to express my thanks to grandmaster Vladimir Belov and to Honoured USSR Trainers Alexander Nikitin and Mark Dvoretzky for their help in preparing this volume for publication.

Garry Kasparov
August 2004

Chapter One

Tigran the Ninth

In his best years Tigran Vartanovich Petrosian (17 June 1929 – 3 August 1984) used to lose so rarely, that each defeat of his became a sensation. For this truly legendary impregnability he was nicknamed ‘iron Tigran’, although on account of his very distinctive ‘passive’ style it was hard to associate his name with the proud conquerors of the chess throne.

Meanwhile, Petrosian had a complete mastery of the art of creating harmonious positions, full of life, where behind the apparent absence of dynamics was concealed a colossal internal energy (the slightest changes being immediately taken into account in the general strategy, which was not always understandable to the opponent). As yet his games have not been studied as thoroughly and as comprehensively as one would like. He presented to the chess world what seem to be common truths, but it is they that essentially comprise the basis of chess creativity. The depth of Tigran Vartanovich’s style is a consequence of the clarity of his thinking and his uncommon grasp not only of global chess problems, but also all the subtleties of tactics and strategy.

‘Yes, perhaps I like defending more than attacking, but who has demonstrated that defence is a less risky and dangerous occupation than attack? And are there so few games that have found their way into the treasury of chess thanks to virtuoso defence?’ said Petrosian. ‘What I value more than anything in chess is logic. I am firmly convinced that in chess there is nothing accidental. This is my credo. I believe only in logical, “correct” play.’

He ascended to the throne in the year I was born, 1963. The ‘Botvinnik era’, which had lasted through a generation of Soviet players and to many seemed endless, was concluding. Botvinnik’s absolute superiority had evaporated back in the early 1950s, but he had retained the world champion’s crown, safely preserved not only by his enormous match experience and ability to prepare effectively for any specific opponent, but also by the right of the return match – a diabolical test for

a new king, which became an excessive psychological burden for both Smyslov and Tal. And yet their accession to the throne was imagined by many to be a quite natural continuation of chess history: the crystal clarity of Smyslov's play and the incomparable magic of Tal's combinations seemed worthy landmarks in the new chess world. But Petrosian?!

Not Just a Defender

Petrosian was born and grew up in Tbilisi, where he learned the rudiments of chess from the subtle positional master Arlich Ebralidze, a great admirer of Capablanca and Nimzowitsch. Tigran's progress was as measured and unhurried as his style. In 1945 – champion of Georgia, in 1946 – USSR junior champion (14 out of 15!) and in 1947, at the very first attempt – the master title. Modest, as though limbering-up performances, in two USSR Championships (1949 and 1950), and a win in the championship of his second 'little motherland' – Moscow. Finally, his first major success – in the Zonal, 19th USSR Championship (1951): after two initial defeats the young master gained eight wins with seven draws and qualified for the Interzonal tournament!

The scale of this triumph can be assessed only by looking at the leading places: 1. Keres – 12 out of 17; 2-3. Geller and Petrosian – 11½; 4. Smyslov – 11; 5. Botvinnik – 10; 6-8. Averbakh, Bronstein and Taimanov – 9½ etc. It became clear that some new stars had appeared on the chess horizon.

Petrosian was awarded a special

prize for the best result against the grandmasters. This strong defender with good endgame technique, as the press commented, 'manoeuvred excellently, basing his strategic ideas on deep and accurate calculation, and tirelessly strove for the initiative.' And, just imagine, he employed risky openings, boldly sacrificing material! A classic example is his duel with Vasily Smyslov: even against one of the strongest players in the world, Petrosian was not afraid to play the sharp Tolush-Geller gambit.

Game 1

T.Petrosian-V.Smyslov

19th USSR Championship,

Moscow 1951

Slav Defence D15

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 c6 5 e4!? b5 6 e5

Generally speaking, 'Petrosian' and 'sacrifice' are not words that chess players tend to associate together. When it is a question of combinations and sacrifices, those who are more likely to be remembered are Alekhine, Tal and Spassky (who, incidentally, instead of 6 e5 devised 6 ♔c2!?), and of the present-day fighters – Shirov. But, as we shall see many times, Petrosian also did not avoid a sharp fight (especially if it was imposed on him), but he always proceeded from the demands of the position – and if the position demanded sacrifices, he was prepared to make them.

6... ♘d5 7 a4 e6

If 7... ♗e6?! there would probably have

Game 43

M. Bobotsov-T. Petrosian

Lugano Olympiad 1968

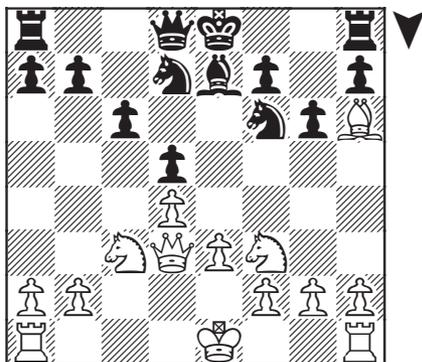
Queen's Gambit D36

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 cxd5 exd5
 5 ♘c3 c6 6 ♙g5 ♙e7 7 ♚c2 g6 8 e3 ♙f5
 9 ♙d3 ♙xd3 10 ♚xd3 ♘bd7!

This is more subtle than 10...0-0
 11 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 12 b4.

11 ♙h6

This move is hardly obligatory. 11 0-0 is better, but in principle this is not so important, since in any case the same kinds of position arise. Those interested in this topic can be referred to the 2nd game of my match with Andersson (Belgrade 1985).



11...♘g4! 12 ♙f4 0-0 13 0-0 ♚e8 14 h3
 ♘f6 15 ♘e5 ♘b6!

An original and very deep positional idea. Black avoids the exchange of the 'good' knight at e5, and moves his knight to the 'bad' square b6. But in fact, the knight is predatorily eyeing the c4-square, in anticipation of the standard minority pawn attack b2-b4-b5. And in

general, after the exchange of the light-squared bishops, Black has play aimed at exploiting the weak light squares in the opponent's position. As for the e5-knight, let it stand there for the moment...

16 ♙g5?!

This merely provokes further exchanges, which, strangely enough, turn out to favour Black.

16...♘e4! 17 ♙xe7 ♚xe7 18 ♚c2 ♘d6!

19 ♘a4 ♘bc4

It was simpler to play 19...♘xa4! 20 ♚xa4 f6, immediately reaching the desired position.

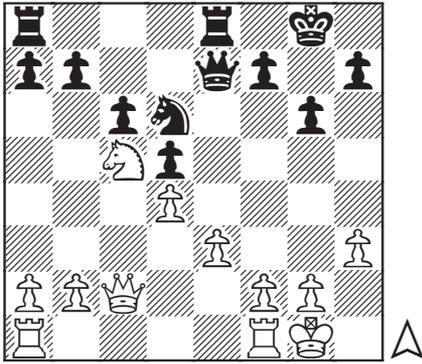
20 ♘xc4 ♘xc4 21 ♘c5 ♘d6

Now the structure in question has arisen.

Surprisingly, Black already has some positional advantage: White's usual play on the queenside – the minority pawn attack – has come to a standstill (he cannot play b2-b4-b5, since Black always has ...a7-a6), whereas some rather unpleasant tests await him on the kingside. There is also a long-term factor: Black, paradoxical though it may seem, has the better pawn structure. But why?! – both sides' pawns appear to be good. For the reason that it is much easier for him to build up an attack against the opponent's pawn base! Whereas usually in the 'Carlsbad' formation it is just the opposite, and it is White who succeeds in generating an attack, which is why it is generally considered that the pawn structure is better for him.

Petrosian demonstrates an original *exception to the rules*. The key role here is played by the sentry knight at d6, suppressing any attempts with b4-b5.

Under its watchful eye Black can calmly prepare an advance of his kingside pawns.



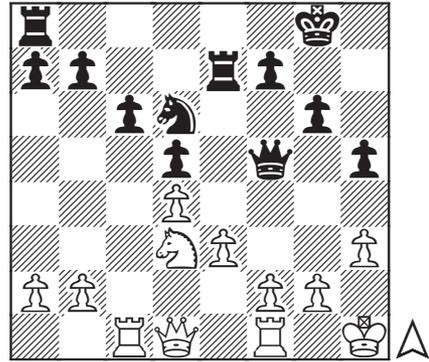
22 ♖ac1

It is hard playing when you can't see a plan that is even slightly active. Bobotsov begins marking time, avoiding the 'hole-forming' 22 b4 and a2-a4. But I remember that when I was annotating the aforementioned game with Portisch, I recommended the cumbersome manoeuvre of the knight to c3, even though it involved losing a mass of tempi, in order nevertheless to be able to play b4-b5. It is only with the break-up of Black's queenside that White can obtain any real targets to attack.

22...♖g5! 23 ♖d1 h5 24 ♖h1 ♗e7 25 ♘d3 ♘e4 26 ♘c5?!

26 b4 is possible.

26...♘d6 27 ♘d3 ♖f5



28 ♘e5?! f6 29 ♘f3 ♗g7!

With the threat of ...g6-g5-g4.

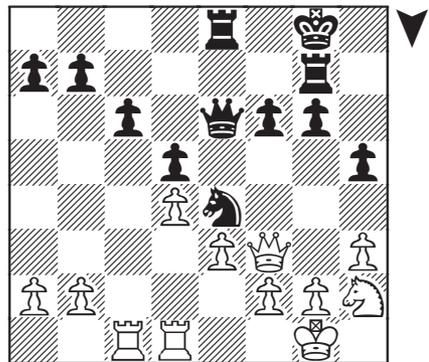
30 ♘h2

Completing the inglorious march of this once powerful knight. In the meantime Petrosian has unhurriedly strengthened his position and his advantage is now obvious.

30...♗e8 31 ♖g1 ♘e4 32 ♖f3

32 f3 also has obvious drawbacks.

32...♖e6 33 ♗fd1



33...g5!

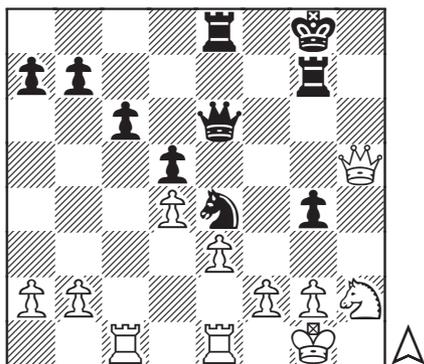
An energetic pawn sacrifice, although it was possible to manage without it. But this is again an instructive moment: the 'cautious' Petrosian gives up a pawn! This means that the position is

already so ripe for decisive action, that Black does not begrudge giving up one of his infantrymen. In contrast to modern computers, which consider such sacrifices to be blunders, even at that time a strong player realised that preparatory moves such as 33...♖f7 (followed by ...g6-g5), even though not bad, were no longer necessary.

34 ♖xh5 f5

A strong attack on the king now develops, with White's extra pawn not playing any role. Bobotsov loses very quickly, but it seems to me that it is already impossible to find a satisfactory defence here.

35 ♜e1 g4 36 hxg4 fxg4



37 f3

After this move Petrosian flamboyantly traps the queen. 37 ♖h4 would seem to be more tenacious, but the 'human+machine' tandem easily discovers the elegant 37...♜g6! (37...♜f8 38 ♜f1) 38 ♜f1 (or 38 f3 gxf3 39 ♖xf3 ♜h6 40 ♖f4 ♜f8 41 ♖e5 ♖g4!) 38...♙g7 39 f4 ♖d6 40 ♖e1 ♖f5 41 ♜c3 ♜h8! (41...g3?! 42 ♖f3 ♜h8 43 ♖g5) with a mating attack.

37...gxf3 38 ♖xf3

Also bad was 38 ♖xf3 ♜f8 39 ♖e2 ♜f2! 40 ♖xf2 ♖xf2 41 ♙xf2 ♖g6.

38...♜h7 39 ♖e5 ♖c8 40 ♖f4 ♜f8 41 ♖e5 ♜f5 0-1

Perhaps not the most outstanding game, but an instructive one: the subtle and non-routine positional idea employed here enriched the treasury of strategic skills. Two decades later I was able to employ the same idea.

Game 44

L.Portisch-G.Kasparov

World Cup, Skelleftea 1989

Queen's Gambit D36

1 d4 d5 2 ♖f3 ♖f6 3 c4 e6 4 cxd5 exd5
5 ♖c3 c6 6 ♖c2 ♖a6 7 a3 ♖c7 8 ♙g5 g6!?
9 e3

9 e4 dxe4 10 ♖xe4 ♙g7 11 0-0-0 0-0 12 h4
♙f5 13 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 14 h5 ♜e8 15 ♙d3 ♙g7
is hardly dangerous for Black.

9...♙f5 10 ♙d3

10 ♖b3 ♜b8.

10...♙xd3 11 ♖xd3 ♙e7 12 0-0 0-0 13 b4

Or 13 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 14 b4 ♖e7 with equality.

13...♖e4! 14 ♙f4!

14 ♙h6?! ♜e8, and now 15 ♖xe4? dxe4
16 ♖xe4 ♙f8 17 ♖f4 ♖e6 is bad.

14...♖xc3 15 ♖xc3?

Careless play; the correct path was
15 ♙xc7! ♖xc7 16 ♖xc3 with equality.

15...♙d6! 16 ♙xd6 ♖b5! 17 ♖b3 ♖xd6

A familiar picture. Portisch was faced with the same problem as Bobotsov: what to play next?